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Meaningful Engagement

New Alumni Association President Sundeep Mullangi '97 envisions exciting ways for alumni to connect and help preserve the Wesleyan promise for future generations.

Story by SARAH (ZELLER) JULIAN '07 & TIM OBERMILLER

Sundeep Mullangi '97 believes that IWU alumni love their alma mater but don't always know how to stay involved — or that they're even needed. He wants to change that.

Since being elected this past spring as president of the University's Alumni Association, Mullangi has fully committed himself to the role.

With an extensive history of service to the University and a knack for numbers, Mullangi's goals include increasing alumni volunteerism and financial support. "We have 22,000 alums, and my goal is to provide more opportunities for them to engage with the University in ways that are meaningful to them," he says. "I want to get more people involved."

The Alumni Association's mission is to strengthen relationships between alumni, current students and the University; to provide more ways for alumni to connect with one another and to encourage alumni participation in the University's achievement of its educational goals. Since its official founding in 2000, the association has grown to include several regional alumni chapters; networks for minority, young and Greek alumni; the Council for IWU Women and the Pride Alumni Community.

Other groups include the Wesleyan Fund Board, the Alumni Admissions Network and the Class Newsletter Committee. The association's Executive Board includes representatives from all of these groups (who each serve three-year terms). There are also 10 "at large" members selected to provide diversity of class year, gender, race and demography.

As president, Mullangi says he wants to lead the Alumni Association in finding ways "to better reach and meaningfully connect with alumni."

"We're reaching more people through expanding our regional activities in places such as Milwaukee and Minneapolis," he says. "I want to keep engaging more alumni across the United States as well as the world. I'd also like to utilize social media to a greater degree. There are ways we could be connecting with each other for mutual gain and for the betterment of IWU."

Mullangi wants to establish new bridges between Bloomington and Chicago, where most alumni are concentrated. "We're having professors come up to Chicago and speak about topics of interest, and alums are going down to campus to speak to classes and participate in panel discussions."

He also sees potential in State Farm Hall, the University's new state-of-the-art classroom building. "The technology in State Farm Hall should allow for more alumni to bring their expertise in their respective professions into the classroom. Video-conferencing is just one example of the ways technology can make this more possible now than in years past."

Mullangi's "business acumen and management experience" make him an ideal fit for the role of president, says Scott Huch '86, who serves on the Alumni Association's Executive Board. "I expect Sundeep to help the board and alumni volunteers to take the IWU Alumni Association to the next level of its development."



Mullangi — who lives in Chicago with his wife Trissa Babrowski '98 and their three young children — serves as managing director of PPM America, an investment firm that manages approximately \$100 billion in assets in the United States. He is a bond analyst covering global financial institutions.



Mullangi leads an Executive Board meeting. “He’s focused on setting achievable, measurable goals, but he’s also good at working with people and building consensus,” says board member Scott Huch ’86.

Mullangi joined the Alumni Association’s Executive Board in 2009 and served as the board’s Wesleyan Fund representative. “I think Sundeep is absolutely the right guy for the job at this moment in the University’s life,” says Jeff Mavros ’98, director of the Wesleyan Fund.

“Sundeep is a numbers guy. He is big on assessment and measurable outcomes,” Mavros continues. “He understands that having less than one in four alumni donating regularly is unsustainable, and he knows that changing the culture on campus and among our alumni to incorporate giving more widely is essential for the future welfare of IWU.”

Huch, who has also worked with Mullangi on increasing Wesleyan Fund participation, cites Mullangi’s “tremendous enthusiasm for building alumni financial support for IWU. He’s focused on setting achievable, measurable goals, but he’s also good at working with people and building consensus.”

Those are talents Mullangi has shown since his college days, according to Ann Harding, director of Alumni Relations. “Sundeep was a highly involved and motivated student while here at IWU,” says Harding. Participating as a class officer and as a member of the IWU Accounting Society and Phi Gamma Delta fraternity, he stayed connected to the University after graduation, hosting Minority Alumni Network picnics at his home and serving as a class agent.

“Sundeep loves Illinois Wesleyan and wanted to find a way to help years ago, just as many alumni do,” Harding adds. “Then the more he got involved — and the more he learned about our challenges and the great things our students were doing — the more he wanted to make an impact.”

“He knows enough about IWU at this point that he is practically a member of our professional staff,” Mavros says. “Anyone that sees as much as we do about what’s happening on campus can’t help but want to make a real difference for our remarkable students.”

Mullangi says it is his passion for Illinois Wesleyan, and its power to change lives for the better, that has kept him close to the University since graduation. “When I came to Wesleyan, I didn’t really know what I wanted to do,” he recalls. “It was a place where I could challenge myself and do things other than what I knew, which is the hallmark of a liberal arts education.”

He majored in economics and accounting but immersed himself in other disciplines. A course on the American presidency taught by Associate Professor of Political Science James Simeone opened his eyes. “He was the first professor to push me away from my academic comfort zone,” Mullangi says.

Simeone’s class inspired him to take on an internship in Washington, D.C., working for a congressional representative. Civics continues to pique his interest. “I’ve always wanted to go into politics,” he says, “but I feel that going into politics is something you need to do after you’ve experienced life — meaning I don’t want to be a 30-year-old politician, I want to be a 50-year-old politician.”

Another seminal IWU experience happened his junior year, when Mullangi traveled to Ireland to study poetry during a May Term course with Professor of English James McGowan. “I loved it,” he says. “I never would have opened those books without the course. I still look back today and say that those classes were the most influential in my life.”



Mullangi and wife Trissa Babrowski '98 have attended or hosted many alumni connections. This photo from 2008 shows them at a Minority Alumni Network event where they introduced their son Tian to Deon Hornsby '97, center, and others. (Photo by Marc Featherly)

The Wesleyan campus is also where he met his future wife, Trissa, who was studying pre-med at the time. She is now in her final year of a vascular surgery fellowship at the University of Chicago. The couple and their three children live in Chicago's Hyde Park neighborhood.

"Attending Wesleyan is a phenomenal experience, and I want students, now and in the future, to have the same experience I had," Mullangi says. But to keep that experience alive, an increase in financial support is needed.

"Sundeep's first challenge has been leading alumni volunteers to help get the Wesleyan Fund for Annual Giving back on track," says Huch. "IWU is fighting the headwinds of some very troubling trends in higher education — in particular, an overall decline in alumni participation and annual-fund giving at colleges all over America. Illinois Wesleyan can turn this around and buck the trend, but the active involvement of many more alumni will be critical."

To face those headwinds, Mullangi will channel his long-held passion for Wesleyan. He believes more alumni will join him, once they become aware of those challenges.

"As volunteers come on board, we've been asking them to give their time, their talent and their treasure," he says. "As students, we stood on the shoulders of alumni, and now it's incumbent on us to pay it forward — especially now, when financial need is so great."

"When you start to see IWU as more than an institution, but as the sum of the people who touched your life through that institution, you realize you are part of the fabric of what Illinois Wesleyan is," says Huch. "Giving back to IWU becomes a natural expression of your appreciation for the way your life is different, and better, because of Illinois Wesleyan."

"This is why Sundeep will make such a strong leader for the Alumni Association right now — he is only asking his fellow alumni to do what he is already doing himself. I'm hopeful that many alumni will be inspired by Sundeep's leadership by example."

Looking to the future, Mullangi says he is counting on "a tradition at IWU of meeting tough challenges and growing better from the experience. I know the Wesleyan spirit, and that is what makes me optimistic."

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